

Chapter Six

EVALUATING SURVEYED PROPERTIES



Ossian Sweet House, Detroit

Evaluation of the historic significance of the surveyed properties is the very heart of the survey project since the properties evaluated as historically significant are the ones to which future historic preservation planning efforts will be geared and the rest of the properties will likely be excluded from future preservation planning. The historic significance of the surveyed properties must be assessed against a standard criteria. Evaluation criteria developed for survey projects of all kinds should use or be based upon the National Register of Historic Places Criteria for Evaluation. The

national register criteria form a broadly worded framework for evaluating the diversity of historic resources in an area and across the nation. The survey project's overview and narratives identify events and persons important in the area's history as well as important aspects of the area's architectural, engineering, and/or artistic history and define the context within which the historic significance of the surveyed properties can be evaluated. The overview and narratives provide the means of translating the national register criteria into locally meaningful terms.

National Register Criteria for Evaluation

Criteria: The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and:

- A. That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
- B. That are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or
- C. That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
- D. That have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in history or prehistory.

Criteria Considerations: Ordinarily cemeteries, birthplaces, or graves of historical figures, properties owned by religious institutions or used for religious purposes, structures that have been moved from their original locations, reconstructed historic buildings, properties primarily commemorative in nature, and properties that have achieved significance within the past 50 years shall not be considered eligible for the national register. However, such properties will qualify if they are integral parts of districts that do meet the criteria or if they fall within the following categories:

- A. A religious property deriving primary significance from architectural or artistic distinction or historical importance; or
- B. A building or structure removed from its original location but which is significant primarily for architectural value, or which is the surviving structure most importantly associated with a historic person or event; or
- C. A birthplace or grave of a historical figure of outstanding importance if there is no appropriate site or building directly associated with his productive life; or
- D. A cemetery which derives its primary significance from graves of persons of transcendent importance, from age, from distinctive design features, or from associations with historic events; or
- E. A reconstructed building when accurately executed in a suitable environment and presented in a dignified manner as part of a restoration master plan, and when no other building or structure with the same association has survived; or
- F. A property primarily commemorative in intent if design, age, tradition, or symbolic value has invested it with its own exceptional significance; or
- G. A property achieving significance within the past 50 years if it is of exceptional importance.

The evaluation process consists of assessing properties from three perspectives:

- Historic context
- Historic significance
- Historic integrity

Historic resources must be understood within the framework of the historic themes with which they are associated and the place and time in which they occurred. The theme, geographic parameters, and temporal definition — for example, popular music (theme) in Detroit (place) in 1920-1975 (time frame) — form the *context* for understanding a property. Evaluations need to include a comparison with properties that are similar in terms of function, form or style, and relationship to a historic event and a comparison with other properties associated with the same historic theme(s) and in the same geographic area and time frame. The geographic area that forms one of the bases for evaluation may need to be larger than the survey area to provide an adequate context for evaluation. In general, evaluations should be made, at a minimum, within the context of the entire community.

The historic significance of an above-ground property refers to its importance in the history, architecture, or culture of the local area, state, or nation. Significance is defined in terms of the four national register criteria that concern historic events, important people, distinctive physical

characteristics, and information potential.

The historic integrity of a property refers to the extent that physical components have survived from the historic period — in other words, how much the property resembles its historic appearance. The national register criteria defines seven qualities of integrity that properties must meet: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

If the history of a property is deemed important within one or more historic themes, and if the property possesses a high degree of integrity, it is generally considered significant, or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The purpose of an above-ground survey is to determine which properties within the survey area possess sufficient significance within one or more historic themes and sufficient integrity to qualify for national register listing. The purpose of documenting historic properties and researching individual and thematic histories is to provide the information needed to perform evaluations.

In addition to these instructions, survey personnel should review the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Evaluation; National Register Bulletin 15, *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*; and other National Register Bulletins, as appropriate to the surveyed resources (see Appendix F). All are available from the SHPO.

PERFORMING EVALUATIONS

The first step in the evaluation process is to develop lists of surveyed properties that relate to each defined historic theme. The list for each theme should include not only all properties that clearly possess historical significance but also a sampling of properties more representative of broader types of properties that reflect the theme. The list for each theme should be organized by the broad property type categories (such as Commercial or Domestic) as defined in the Ruskin record for the property. Districts identified in the field survey and complex properties such as farms, industrial complexes, parks, and cemeteries should each be listed and evaluated as a whole; components should not be listed and evaluated separately unless the entire district or complex property turns out *not* to meet the criteria. Some properties will relate to more

than one theme; these should be listed under all appropriate themes. The associated property list for the architecture theme should be organized by the styles, building forms, or other aspects of the survey area's architecture defined in the narrative as significant.

Then, using the national register criteria for evaluation as the basis, develop minimum standards for evaluating properties associated with each of the survey area's defined historic themes. For each theme, define the following:

- Which property types are important in illustrating the theme?
- How do the national register criteria apply to *each property type* (in some cases several property types may be grouped together) on the basis of the important events, people, and

patterns, etc., developed in the narratives?

- What level of physical integrity must a property possess to be eligible for listing as a member of the property type?

The following are examples of specific criteria established for individual property types or groupings of property types within a theme:

- The criteria under the theme of commerce might define a commercial building as eligible for the national register if it housed a leading commercial enterprise by virtue of its size and role in the community (a department store in a large community or a general store in a small community, for example) or if it housed a specific business or business use for a long period of time (a hardware or clothing

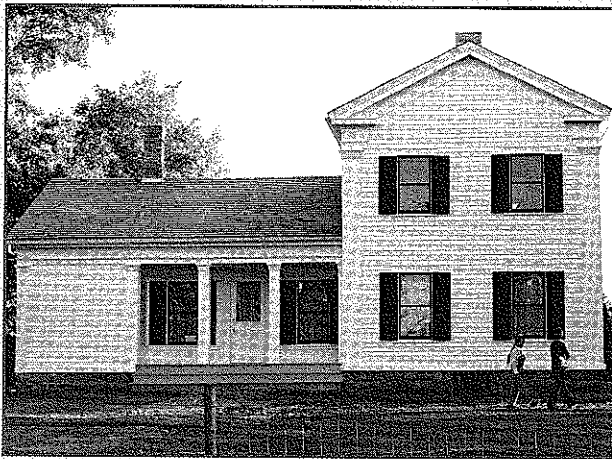
store, or a succession of shoe stores or ice cream parlors, that remained in business at the same location, for example).

- The criteria under the commerce theme might define a house as eligible for the national register if it is associated with a pioneer merchant or businessperson who owned an important business or a business which remained in operation for a long period of time.

The criteria should be tailored to the survey area's historic themes and to the surveyed properties and property types. The criteria developed for each theme should relate directly to the theme and associated property types. Avoid using a standard, "canned" criteria that applies to all themes.

Applying the Criteria

A Case Study: The Home of a Settler from New York State



*A New York settler's house: the DeLano House
Kalamazoo County*

A building that was the home of a pioneer settler from New York State should be reviewed in terms of the broad pattern of migration to the area from upstate New York and the settler's importance as a reflection of that migration and as a member of the community, and, conceivably, the importance of the building itself in reflecting the architectural tastes of the day in that area.

In reviewing eligibility, the history of the area should be considered. For the settler's house, it is important to know whether or not the migration from upstate New York to this area was a common pattern. If it was, the house can be viewed as possessing some significance through the connection with this broad pattern of local history.

It is also important to know whether the settler played a significant role in local history. Was he or she a businessperson who established a general store that served the community for a long period of time, for example, or a farmer who played a key role in introducing a new and ultimately important crop? In other words, was the subject someone who made a definable contribution to local history?

Architectural significance also may be a factor in the evaluation. Does this upstate New York settler's house fall into a broad architectural pattern in illustrating the use of building forms or materials characteristic of upstate New York that were used by other early settlers who came from that area? Does the building exemplify commonly used traditional house forms or high style design of its period, or is it an important example of its designer's work — whether the designer was a fashionable architect of national reputation or a local carpenter-builder?

Once some conclusions concerning how the building fits into the patterns of local history have been reached, an attempt should then be made to determine whether the house is of sufficient importance within

Applying the Criteria

A Case Study: The Home of a Settler from New York State (continued)

these historical patterns to merit designation. For example, perhaps the settler was but one of a great number of such people who settled in the same general area and many of the houses these settlers built have survived. The evaluation of this particular building's importance in representing the theme of eastern migration to the area might be much less than it would be if only a few of the early settlers' homes had survived, say in an urban area.

Here, the issue of physical integrity becomes important. If fifty houses that relate to the settlement of the area by New Yorkers survive, certainly some of them — all other things being equal — illustrate better than others what it was like for these New Yorkers to establish new lives in Michigan in the early days. Those that retain enough of their historic appearance and character to provide a clear illustration are of greater importance than those that have lost this ability.

Synthetic siding, major renovations that result in the loss of original materials such as trim, and moving from the original site reduce the ability of a building to convey its significant history. Most buildings do not remain in a pristine form, and many have been moved. How much the alterations have reduced the overall ability of the building to illustrate the history must be evaluated. In effect, the standards for physical integrity for properties possessing historical significance only mildly related to the architecture differ somewhat from those of properties whose significance is primarily architectural.

The New York settler's house loses a strong measure of significance if it is moved off the property on which the pioneers actually settled. The house loses some measure of significance if synthetic siding is installed or other changes are made, but may retain sufficient integrity to be eligible if the changes made are reversible ones that do not change the fundamental character of the property.

On the other hand, a building that is viewed as eligible primarily because of its architectural value in illustrating high style or vernacular tastes of its time period may not be viewed as losing integrity by being moved (as long as the new setting is appropriate), but may be viewed as losing a substantial amount of integrity by being sided or changed in other ways that reduce the building's ability to illustrate the historic architectural finishes and materials.

IDENTIFYING AND DOCUMENTING POTENTIAL HISTORIC DISTRICTS

One purpose of a survey is to identify and document any potential historic districts located within the survey area. "A district," according to National Register Bulletin 15, *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*, "possesses a significant concentration, linkage, or continuity of sites, buildings, structures, or objects united historically or aesthetically by plan or physical development. . . . A district derives its importance from being a unified entity even though it is often composed of a wide variety of resources. The identity of a district results from the interrelationship of its resources, which can convey a visual sense of the overall historic environment or be an arrangement of historically or functionally related properties."

Historic districts commonly encompass business districts, residential neighborhoods, and rural villages and agricultural districts. These areas must

possess significance under one or more of the national register criteria and retain an adequate level of physical integrity. The boundaries must include the full extent of the historic resources related to the applicable historic themes and time frames while excluding adjacent areas whose properties bear no strong relationship to them.

The historical overview's thematic narratives and the property-specific research should suggest which areas within the overall survey area are potentially eligible for the national register as historic districts. The significance of each such area should be evaluated in terms of the defined themes and the property types present and by comparison with other resources in the survey area and community that exemplify those same themes and property types. Boundaries should be defined on the basis of significance and integrity.

EVALUATION RESULTS

Individual and complex properties and districts meeting one or more of the four basic national register criteria and possessing adequate integrity should be considered eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. For each property, complex property, or district evaluated as eligible, prepare summary description and significance statements for inclusion in the Evaluations section of the survey report. For most individual and complex properties, these will be brief

description and significance paragraphs similar to the summary paragraphs required at the beginning of the description and significance statements of national register nominations. For districts and larger complex properties, more extended statements will probably be required to adequately describe and explain the significance of the resources. See **the instructions for Evaluation Results in the Survey Report section of Chapter 7, Survey Products.**

THE EVALUATION PROCESS IN RECONNAISSANCE LEVEL SURVEYS

A reconnaissance level survey should *never* be considered the end of the survey process. It is the first step in a two-step process. Reconnaissance level survey will not provide sufficient information to permit informed judgments of significance. It is designed to provide a preliminary look at a survey area's historic resources that will make it possible to focus the intensive level survey activities to follow on the areas and properties that appear most to merit them.

In evaluating properties surveyed at the reconnaissance level, the same general process used for intensive level surveys should be utilized to the degree that the historical information permits. The survey data will help locate the scattered individual properties that may possess significance in terms of their architecture or age as well as the areas within the overall survey area that contain concentrations of older and architecturally noteworthy properties that merit intensive level survey. The historical overview with its thematic narratives may help identify some individual properties as being worthy of

further study. It may also help identify larger areas that may possess historical significance as a whole or contain concentrations of properties that possess individual historical significance. A reconnaissance level survey may result in evaluations of some properties as national register-eligible when historical information permits informed judgments. For the most part, however, a reconnaissance level survey will result in a series of recommendations for intensive level survey of defined areas and individual properties. These recommendations should be as specific as possible. A rationale for including each area or individual property in the recommendations for intensive level survey should be provided as part of the report's Evaluation Results section at the conclusion of the project. Boundaries for areas deemed to merit further study should be clearly defined in writing and on maps provided as part of the Evaluation Results section. Street addresses for individual properties recommended for intensive level survey should also be provided.